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ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that the concept of teachers' vision (teachers' images of their ideal classroom practices) may provide a particularly powerful way of understanding variations in teachers' experiences and dealing with prospective teachers' experiences of "reality shock" or disillusionment when entering the profession. It proposes that understanding teachers' vision may offer a good way to appreciate the decisions that teachers make and the experiences they have in the classroom. By examining the visions of two new teachers, the paper demonstrates how vision can help provide a better understanding of what and how the teachers choose to teach, how much they challenge their students, what they learn about teaching and schooling, and whether or not they elect to remain in the profession. Drawing upon the two cases, this paper suggests some implications for how focusing upon vision in teacher education programs could help better support and sustain teachers who have become frustrated in their teaching lives and work. It notes the importance of achieving a balance between attention to the visions of individuals and attention to the visions of institutions. (Contains 18 references.) (SM)

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Learning to hope, or hoping to learn?
The role of vision in the early professional lives of teachers

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Introduction

Two Conversations

Andrea. Andrea and I are sitting together at noon on a warm day in late May, 1998. The sun is shining through the big glass windows in her classroom and we can hear the voices of some students seated outside on the lawn beneath the windows, eating their lunches. Andrea, a first-year teacher, has just finished reading several scenes from Romeo and Juliet with two classes of ninth grade students, and I have been a visitor for both classes. At my request, she has been reflecting upon what she did that day, and then I ask her about some comments she made in a previous interview about possibly leaving teaching. Andrea responds that she has been struggling with that question.

Andrea is feeling more and more dismayed that the kind of classroom that she has long envisioned is in no way reflected in her current practice. For years, Andrea has imagined cultivating a student-centered classroom in which teenagers were deeply engaged in sophisticated literary analysis, not unlike the rich roundtable discussions she had enjoyed as a high school student herself. Yet at her current school, Jefferson High School, a large public school in a lower-income community in Northern California with a diverse student body[1], she feels that her students are not prepared to engage in literature in the sophisticated ways she had imagined. She struggles with putting the elements of her ideal classroom into place, and feels she has little means, no collegial support and few resources with which to actually accomplish those kind of classroom interactions. She is beginning to feel that she has been too "idealistic" about what she could effect in teaching, and reflects that her dreams have become "an unrealistic vision for me right now."

Currently, she is interviewing at other schools, wondering whether perhaps she still does want to teach but perhaps "just not here." However, she feels quite guilty about leaving Jefferson, her current school;

> ... at the same time, I keep thinking well, if I have the choice I should be teaching in a place like this because maybe this is where kids need me the most and where I feel like maybe I could make a difference. But I feel like I'm not making a difference. And so I don't know if maybe that was part guilt, saying, "Since I can't do it, well, I just shouldn't do it at all."

She explains that she is feeling particularly disheartened lately:

> ...even though people keep reassuring me that, "well, don't get discouraged", ... I...just had progress reports and I have 55% of my students failing right now. And it's not enough that the other English teachers are saying, "I've been here twenty-five years and it's been the same way ever since I've been here. I always have 50% of my kids failing. It's not you, it's them."

Andrea reflects, "And that's okay and maybe that will be okay for half an hour, but then I think, 'Well, no, that's not okay with me.'"

Kelly. It's a cold Sunday morning in February, 1998. I reach for the telephone to call Kelly, to find out how her school year is going. She is at a new school and I am curious to hear about the work she has been doing there. Kelly is halfway through her first year teaching ninth grade science at Hilltop, a small, alternative urban school. It is a relatively new school that had begun as a program in a larger public high school and has only three years in existence on its own. Kelly has been excited about what she saw as the great potential of Hilltop, particularly with the kinds of approaches and abilities the students seemed to have developed as learners at Hilltop. Kelly had always imagined a classroom in which students were learning science in a more "real-world" fashion, learning about the subject through projects. She envisioned a classroom in which students were self-directed, investigating scientific questions in which they themselves were deeply engaged. Kelly also dreamed of a school in which her approach to teaching and learning was reflected in every classroom—that students experience a consistent emphasis across the school on the development of a set of habits of thinking and working as well as on active learning. She commented that she felt as if Hilltop had a "lot of potential, a lot of things leaning toward" helping her attain that vision of teaching.

Now, on a chilly, snowy February morning, six months into her work at Hilltop, Kelly tells me about her experience thus far, and reflects that this year feels different from last year when I interviewed her, as well as from her previous teaching experiences. She muses, "it's like the first time I think we have staff... where everybody is not only open to it but we're actually going to try it. We're actually going to try and implement it." She describes a mixture of eagerness, hope and anxiety that accompanies that realization.

> I'm nervous because I don't know if it's going to work. I mean I should say if anything I'm very much, I'm very hopeful. I'm very excited because…I don't think I've ever been this close to making this vision come true. To being part of making the vision come true...

.....

In these two brief conversations, we see that Andrea and Kelly are learning very different things about their teaching, their students and their schools. They are coming to quite different conclusions about their hopes and dreams. Andrea is learning that her dreams and goals are out of reach, that she and her students are powerless to reach them. Kelly, on the other hand, is learning that her dreams are near reality—that she and her students and her colleagues may actually be able to accomplish some of the ideals she has always held for her students, her classroom and her school. Though both are worried and anxious about the fate of their dreams for their students, Kelly is much more hopeful. So what makes these two teachers' experiences so different? How is it that Andrea has come to simply hope to learn, while Kelly is learning to hope?

The first few years of teaching are often perilous times for teachers like Andrea and Kelly. Many new teachers encounter for the first time the isolation and bureaucracy of schools, an experience some have dubbed "reality shock" (Veenman, 1984). Remarkably little support is afforded to most novices who are simply expected to "sink or swim" (Feiman-Nemser, 1983; The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). If assistance is provided for new teachers, it tends to be focused upon the technical, often ignoring differences in school and classroom contexts that lead new teachers to struggle with demands and issues that may vary considerably from setting to setting. Few teachers remain in teaching beyond this initial "trial by fire" (Britzman, 1991); although estimates vary, studies suggest that somewhere between thirty to fifty percent of beginning teachers leave within the first five years of teaching (Grissmer & Kirby, 1987).

One reason so many new teachers leave is that too many of them are having experiences like Andrea. Of course, many factors may play a role in the experiences of Andrea and Kelly, from personality, to school contexts, to their teacher preparation

programs. However, in this paper, I suggest that the concept of *teachers' vision* may provide a particularly powerful way of understanding the variations in Andrea's and Kelly's experiences. I propose that understanding teachers' vision—teachers' images of their ideal classroom practices—may provide a means for us to better appreciate what decisions teachers make and what experiences they have in the classroom. Through the examination of the visions of these two new teachers, I demonstrate how vision can help us understand what and how these two teachers choose to teach, how much they challenge their students, what they learn about teaching and schooling, and even whether or not they may elect to remain in the profession. Drawing upon these cases, I suggest some implications for how focusing upon vision in their teacher education program could help better support and sustain teachers like Andrea in their teaching lives and work.

Characterizing Vision

Studies of eighty teachers and interviews with sixteen teachers show that many teachers have visions, and that those visions are substantial and concrete, vivid and powerful, and stable and consistent over time (Hammerness, 1999). For many teachers, vision consists of images of what teachers hope could be or might be in their classrooms, their schools, their communities, and in some cases even in society as a whole. For some of these teachers, vision can provide a sense of "reach" that inspires and motivates them, and invites them to reflect upon their work. However, vision doesn't always serve such a beneficial role. For some teachers, like Andrea, the reach feels too distant. Comparing vision to current practice leads them to learn that their visions are impossible and that they and their students are powerless to reach them.

Though teachers' visions are stable and consistent, they vary across three important dimensions; <u>focus</u>, <u>range</u> and <u>distance</u> (Hammerness, 1999). <u>Focus</u> refers to the center, or areas, of interest of the vision. What images, ideas, or aspects enjoy the bulk of concentration? When a teacher describes or envisions a vision, what areas are in focus? Focus also refers to the distinctness or clarity of the vision. One's vision may be sharply defined, with distinct images and interactions, or the vision may be blurry, with vague images and indistinct activity. <u>Range</u> refers to the scope or extent of the focus. The field

of vision may be broad and panoramic or it may be more narrow and specific. For instance, some people may focus upon an area more narrow in scope such as an individual classroom or a particular group of students. Other people may describe a focus that has a broader range, perhaps spanning their community or their school, or maybe even stretching to include a school system, an ethnic community, or even the nation. Distance refers to how close or how far vision is relative to what one is currently doing. Vision may be perceived as quite close to current practices, or it may be extremely distant from daily experiences.

Finally, while not an inherent dimension of vision, one cannot talk about vision and the role it plays in teachers' lives without talking about the contexts in which these teachers imagine and work. Indeed, we will see that whether these teachers feel their contexts provide support—or not—is critically important to their ability to carry out their visions. For purposes of this paper, a supportive or unsupportive context refers to teachers' perceptions of the degree to which aspects such as classroom resources, collegial environment, administration, and even the wider policy context is consistent with his or her vision.[2] These dimensions of vision may provide us with a framework for understanding why Andrea is so despondent—why she has learned to question the innate capacities of her students as well as her own. Such a framework may also help us identify some reasons for why Kelly is so much more hopeful, and why Kelly believes that her ideals and goals could be accomplished.

Andrea

"An unrealistic vision...."

Andrea begins a description of her vision by talking about the physical space of the classroom, about which she is quite specific. The walls are "a bit old"--even the wallpaper has aged; "what was once optic white is now a dullish and soothing yellow." "Bookshelves span one part of the walls and...large beautiful windows look out onto green trees and lovely fields."

No desks are in this room, rather, in the center is a round table. Andrea explains that this is the heart of the room and of the activity. "This is where the students sit—to

face each other and the teacher in a roundtable discussion." One teacher's desk graces a corner of the room, and the "eyes of dead poets" depicted in various posters and artwork look down at the students. This environment, Andrea seems to suggest, fosters learning without even requiring anyone to speak, or act: she follows this description of the physical space with the comment that, "Learning has already begun."

Andrea sees herself playing multiple roles. She is "teacher, leader, purveyor of knowledge, confidante, friend, inspiration, guide." Her physical level is important in this classroom; Andrea sits at the "same level on the same plane" with her students. She sits at the table with them, as she views it, "seeing eye to eye—mind to mind." Andrea does not "sound on through long lectures" but rather provides "short, informative mini-lectures on socio-historical context of the particular novel being studied."

From the students she envisions "loads of classroom participation." She explains that she wants to "learn from my students," commenting that "I want to know what they see and feel and believe." Ideally, Andrea does not tell them what to think, rather she "elicits interpretations from them before offering my own." She suggests the metaphor of investigators as one that illustrates the work of the class: "We take apart the text together--delving through the passages of the text like bold investigators--searching for treasures and truth." She emphasizes that students' roles are to think critically and interpret the text as a community.

> They are engaging in dialogue, challenging themselves and each other to go deeper, look harder to find the answers--the answers to their own questions--if perhaps to life's greater dilemmas as dealt with through literature. They are referring to specific pages, explaining the design of the novel--interpreting imagery, becoming poets themselves. They must search to find something in it for themselves, to reveal to me what it means to them to be navigators, & poets, and young thinkers.

Here Andrea reveals her disciplinary approach: she sees literature as a lens for self-inquiry and understanding; to better understand responses to "life's dilemmas" to which literature has provided multiple responses. In fact, Andrea explains that in this ideal classroom students will learn to "find the beauty in language, how to analyze and interpret it, to understand it, use it, play with it, hear it, write it." She envisions teaching specific texts, novels such as Morrison's Beloved, or Faulkner's Light in August, and

poetry by Sylvia Plath, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou, and T.S. Eliot. Andrea believes that such texts will prompt student questions and inquiry, and will challenge them and inspire them to explore topics such as love, death, female identity, sexuality, history, conquest, and failure. As she sees it, these texts will "challenge and inspire these students as much as possible to make their lives richer and fuller and to make them deeper and stronger about literature and life."

Andrea imagines her ideal classroom as providing a counter to what she views as the "techno-chaos" of current society, and as educating students to be sensitive, insightful and creative thinkers,

> I would love to create and inspire young poets/writers and to encourage their place and their significance in the world. In a world rapidly advancing into "techno-chaos" we need to remember and return to the power of the word, of poetry and language and feelings and teach students to use their gifts and their imaginations to forge a movement towards a highly literate and sensitive society.

Shifting Distance

When I talked to Andrea the first time, right after she had completed her student-teaching year at Jefferson, she explained that she felt that this vision was extremely far from her practice. "I was being very idealistic," she reflected. Indeed, she added that when she wrote her vision statement, she knew that she was not currently able to attain the vision and that it was "an unrealistic vision for me right now." She mused that if I had asked her about the possibility of living this vision at the beginning of the year, she might have felt more optimistic. But now, she was beginning to sense that the vision was impossible. "I would have thought, at that point [at the beginning of the year], 'Oh, I could probably find this somewhere.' And [now] I don't think that I will."

Andrea explained that a number of contextual circumstances constrained her ability to carry out the vision. First, she noted that "money was sort of an issue" in that she couldn't purchase the texts she wanted and she didn't have access to the kinds of books she wanted students to read. She declared, "[lack of funds] completely limited the

possibility of whatever I could take from here [she indicated her vision statement] to put into my current situation." More important, the students she was currently teaching were not as well-prepared, nor as academically motivated as she had expected. She commented with surprise and dismay, "I didn't realize how low skills would be, just like AWFULLY low." She concluded, "And so that, more than anything, limited my ideal vision, because their needs were so different from what I wanted to do."

Narrow Range

During that first interview, Andrea explained that she had begun to question whether the range of her vision was so narrow that it might only be appropriate for students just like herself, who were attending a small private school. Perhaps it was even only possible in her own high school; "Even if I had a great situation, I still don't think I would ever achieve this, unless maybe I went back to teach in my high school," she commented. She was quite critical of what she termed her "ridiculous" reliance on the past, "I mean THIS [indicating vision statement], I think I was limiting myself then and being totally unrealistic." Indeed, Andrea was beginning to wonder whether she should abandon her vision.

> [I]nstead of looking into the past for what would work, in terms of the classroom, even though this [vision] would be my ideal, I'm thinking that I need to move away from this and think about what their needs are and what I need to change in the future for myself.

Yet by the time of the follow-up interview in February, 1998, Andrea explained that rather than abandon her vision, she had broadened its range. Rather than considering her vision as only possible at her alma mater or a similar private school, she was beginning to recognize that perhaps it could happen at a place like Jefferson. As she explained,

> I really thought my ideal was finding a place like where I'd gone to high school and I know we talked about that. And now I really don't think that necessarily that would be my ideal. Like it would be great, but I think that having seen that I can make this [vision] work at a place like Jefferson makes me think that wherever I go, I can pretty much create my ideal classroom.

Calibrating the Focus

The focus of Andrea's vision is upon creating what she might describe as a rich literary experience for her students. Through such experiences—through reading, writing and discussion—students develop the important skills of self-expression and communication. Students are "learning about themselves" by reading sophisticated canonical texts as well as popular literary works. Andrea feels that such pieces are particularly important for students to read because they "reveal so much about how we think, how we feel, and I think get to the core of sort of main themes, issues we deal with in terms of our life."

Andrea returns again and again to discussions and descriptions of these experiences in both interviews as well as in the post-observation interviews, confirming this as a focal point of her vision. For instance, later in the initial interview, Andrea explains that she feels that literary experiences are particularly important for her students, in order to become literature, verbal, well-functioning people. In her words,

> I think it is so important that we still value English and literature and books, because it's important that kids be able to communicate, that they be able to express themselves intelligently, that they can write well, speak well. Because otherwise I don't think you can really function.

Andrea notes at another point in the interview that she feels that literature provides a forum for students to practice their ability to express themselves creatively and individually, an experience that she feels is particularly important for young people.

> I think with things like English and art, there's so much room for freedom of expression, and I think kids really need that. And I push that in my class, to feel that they can really express themselves and say what they think, and learn that, in reading a book, not everyone's going to interpret the same way but that's alright. Kids need that creativity and that freedom.

She also makes this focus clear in her vision statement. Her language conveys the passion she feels about the potential for literature to enrich students' lives;

> The idea is to absolutely challenge and inspire these students as much as possible—to make their lives richer & fuller, to make them feel deeper & stronger about lit[erature] and life—these novels/poets deal with the pain of the human

> condition, with love, death, female identity, sexuality, history, conquest, failure—all the very pieces of real existence that constitute life itself.

Yet despite how strongly Andrea feels about the particular works through which students will acquire such skills of "self-expression," by the time of the initial interview, Andrea had begun to wonder whether she should shift the focus of her vision. Andrea explained that to broaden the range of her vision she has had to shift the vision in particular ways. As she mused, "It just means that I have to adapt—like I have to have flexible vision....I think in terms of my vision meeting the student's needs." She recalls that the low skills and abilities of Jefferson students caught her completely off guard; she could not teach the literature she had envisioned.

> And so the things that I had planned to do, I had to completely change. And the first twenty minutes of the first day, I realized that I could not teach things I wanted to teach...And so that's one thing I don't think I could fully get into this year was the fact that it was reading. I couldn't get into teaching the literature that I love, teaching novels which is what I love.

She thought that perhaps she might do better to teach novels that were not as sophisticated, so that her students might experience literature's benefits without struggling through complex language or intricate plot lines. She described this as "adjusting" her vision.

> And so all the texts that I put in here [indicating vision statement], in terms of things that I would ideally like to teach, didn't happen at all. But that's OK. I still tried to find things that were relevant to them. I think that was something too that I had to adjust.

But even though she was adjusting her vision, Andrea still feels that she is faithful to it. She feels that she has maintained her commitment to the focus of her vision, such as deep engagement in literature and an environment of inspiration, trust, and warmth.

> I want to create that same feeling [as was at my private school]. For example, being the inspiration for my students. My students really engaging in the literature they're reading, feeling inspired by it. The confidence they feel, the warmth, the security of the classroom, that kind of thing. I still strive for that...the overall feeling I try to create in my classroom, that's still something that's taken from the vision. It's still definitely part of my strategy...

In February, 1998, during our follow-up interview, Andrea still felt that her focus had remained the same. Andrea continued to emphasize students' learning about themselves, as in her initial interview, although again she described ways in which she had watered down the vision. For instance, she no longer specified the texts that she originally did. She told me she was realizing that her students were better able to understand texts like To Kill a Mockingbird. She said that now her ideal vision would be that "students felt that what we were studying, *whatever it was*, that they were in some way learning about themselves." Later in the follow-up interview, she remarked that "the basic foundation pieces" of her vision have remained the same, "freedom and confidence and freedom of expression," even when she has altered it to meet their needs.

Indeed, she emphasized that her vision hasn't really changed. "I think I'll always have this vision.... if I had different students, maybe I could take a little bit more from here [indicating vision statement]. I don't know that it would change very much." She concluded, "I still think this is my vision [but] again, I need to think of their needs more than mine. This would fulfill my needs but not necessarily the needs of my students."

The Role of Vision in Andrea's Life

The considerable gap between Andrea's vision and her practice prompts deep feelings of ambivalence and unease. Comparing the experience she and her students are having, to what she had envisioned, is both deeply unsettling and dispiriting. The significant gap leads her to try to understand what is wrong. At varying points in our interviews she locates the problem in different places—her vision, her teaching, her students, her school. Each selection leads to a different reaction; Andrea has at various times experienced them all. Thinking that her vision or her students may be the problem, and while she cannot abandon her vision entirely, leads Andrea to calibrations—shifting, stretching, re-considering—to meet the needs of her students and her vision. Yet because of her concern that she may be watering down her vision, and because she still cares about her vision, she remains uncomfortable. Is she being fair to herself and her vision?

Is her vision appropriate? Is she being fair to her students? Can her students accomplish the vision?

Thus, at other times, she wonders whether it is perhaps her own teaching that has contributed to the gap between vision and practice. She admits, "I still have about 40% of my students fail." Andrea's vision makes her uncomfortable with circumstances that other teachers urge her to accept, such as the high failure rate of her students. As she asserts in her post-observation interview, she has come to believe that the lack of success of her students is "not okay with me." Andrea refuses to shift the blame for her students' failure, declaring that it is her responsibility to figure out how to teach her students well and to try to figure out how to get closer to her vision. Yet the gap between her vision and her reality has also led her to feel guilty and disappointed in herself and to doubt her own abilities as a teacher;

> [M]y ideal classroom is that higher level thinking, that analysis, that interpretation… and it's difficult for me, and I suppose, you know, I blame myself. We did some poetry earlier in the year and some of them still have a lot of trouble with interpretation and looking at language. And I blame myself, …this is what I'm supposed to be teaching them is how to interpret and if they're still not doing it them I obviously fell short somewhere.

At still other times, context looms pre-eminent. At those times, Andrea wonders whether she could perhaps enact her vision if she were in a school similar to her own alma mater. She said several times of her vision, "I still don't think I would even achieve this, unless maybe I went back to my old high school." At these times, she considers leaving Jefferson and finding a new school, one more similar to her own private school.

What Andrea decides to do in the future depends upon how she answers the question. If she continues to feel the problem is her vision or her students, she will continue to water down her vision and give them less challenging work. If she believes the school is the problem, she may probably move to a new location. If she comes to believe the problem is her own practice, she may leave the profession. In fact, despite some of the gains Andrea felt she had made with regards to her students at Jefferson, and despite the fondness she had for her students there, she made a decision to leave Jefferson at the end of her second year. She sought a job at St. Marks, a local private school in a

suburban community not far from where she lives, and began teaching English this past fall.

Kelly
"I'm very hopeful"

When describing her vision in a written statement, Kelly does not talk about the physical layout of the classroom, but rather portrays the atmosphere of the classroom. Her vision is one in which students and teacher explore questions together in an atmosphere of "excitement, earnestness, and life." Investigations are shaped by student interest, rather than by teacher's choice or textbook topics. The environment is charged with excitement and interest; Kelly sees herself "surrounded" by students who have questions "burgeoning" from them, and she sees herself responding with "guidance, coaching, and shared enthusiasm." She also imagines students asking one another the same questions "with the same demand and expectation they ask of me, as though they knew the question was their own, not mine, thus making the answer more important to discover." Kelly imagines students working in a variety of different forms determined by what is appropriate to the task at hand: "some in groups, some individually, in discussions and research working on problems that are 'real-world', practical."

Kelly describes her role in this classroom as "resource-provider," which she contrasts to "knowledge-provider." She explains,

> I feel this is important to remove myself from the role of "information center" and "curriculum dictator" because too often the teacher becomes a human answer key, to whom students go to check their solutions. Teachers should be guides so as to encourage the students to pursue something of an intrinsic motivation. Teacher centered classes motivate students extrinsically, by steering the class in one direction, one interest.

Thus, Kelly imagines her role as one which includes responsibilities such as: checking in with students, guiding them by asking specific questions, "adding something

thoughtful to their questions," coaching them with some suggestions, and occasionally intervening in conflicts.

An important aspect of Kelly's role is also acting as "the human representative" of her subject matter. While Kelly recognizes that one could interpret this notion as "a very teacher-centered role," she explains that one could also think about it quite differently. Indeed, she envisions herself as a facilitator,

> creating a two-way road where a student is also allowed to input—find places where they can input their identity into the curriculum, into the course. Otherwise they don't own it. It just becomes some sort of this false outer shell that they carry around with them and then eventually dump.

Students' responsibilities are that of the "active learner": they create their own agendas and educational goals, they question and challenge information they've encountered, and they critically think through real-world problems. In addition, they "investigate and offer solutions to complex situations which often have no answer, while developing skills and reflecting on their learning."

Kelly emphasizes learning "basic skills." However, she maintains that she does not want to imply the basic skills often proposed by schools that is too frequently equated with memorizing facts and figures (she likens this to a "box" of ideas). Rather, she gives the example of projects as an alternative to learning in a traditional manner, explaining that such explorations can "span across different disciplines with no 'correct' answers." She also points out that such investigations can enable students to identify connections, to apply the same knowledge they might gain in a traditional setting, yet also to gain an understanding of how the world works. In particular, she envisions students confronting ethical implications to the solutions they offer, noting that "the more we can teach them how to think by weighing all the consequences, by developing that reflectiveness...they learn not just academic concepts but also how to be a citizen in this world."

A Focus upon Students Becoming "Independent Thinkers"

The focus of Kelly's vision rests upon a notion of students becoming "independent thinkers." She envisions a classroom that develops young people who can identify, develop and pursue their own interests; who can thoughtfully and reflectively solve new problems when faced with them; and who can recognize how to put their knowledge to use in real-world situations and contexts. This focal point remained consistent throughout both her interviews, as well as in interviews with her during my classroom visits in May. For instance, Kelly talked quite specifically about students learning to "use knowledge" in her initial interview. She explained, "It is important to me that they learn fundamental…principles of science, or fundamental things of math, but it's more important to me that they come out of it feeling confident that they can use knowledge." She said, uncharacteristically cavalierly, "To me, it's like who cares whether they really understand physics." But it was clear that the offhandedness of her comment was meant to underscore her point, for she paused, and then added with more seriousness,

> I would never say this to a student, but…it's more important to me that they understand that when they're faced with something new that they don't shy away from it. Or when they're attacking a difficult problem, that has so many layers that it's hard to attack at one point, that they have enough confidence to say, "OK, I think I'll decide on one point, I'll start here." So those aren't habits, but they're kind of like patterns. And to me, the content is a vehicle for giving them practice in doing that. I guess in my mind, I've always believed that was more important, developing those skills, practicing.

In addition, this focus is also evident in her vision statement, in which she describes the following scene of students pursuing their own intellectual interests:

> The air would be filled with excitement, earnestness and life as these students pursued something of relevance to them. I would be surrounded sometimes with students who had questions burgeoning from them, responding to their inquisitiveness with guidance, coaching and shared enthusiasm. I'd hear them ask each other the same questions they ask of me, as though they know the question was their OWN, not mine, thus making the answer more important to discover.

Thus, Kelly's focal point reflects her beliefs about how people learn best, as well as what young people need to know and do in order to be successful and fulfilled in life. As such,

her focus upon independent thinking represents Kelly's "insight"—her understanding—about the purposes of her teaching and her students' learning.

A Broad Range

While Kelly's vision focuses upon students becoming independent thinkers, able to approach problems with confidence and thoughtfulness, this focus moves beyond her classroom. Kelly envisions a school in which colleagues reinforce and reflect those goals for students. In our initial interview, Kelly emphasized that an extremely important part of her vision was an ongoing, strong relationship with like-minded colleagues. She likened her image of herself in her vision to an "octopus, with all these tentacles" suggesting that as a teacher she imagined having a "huge network" of lines of communication to colleagues. Thus, she could support her students with the assistance of fellow teachers and staff who would know the students equally well, as well could contribute their perspectives of the students from other arenas in different subject matters and classes.

Indeed, the broad range of Kelly's vision reflects her insistence and understanding that such collegial and institutional supports are necessary to enact her classroom vision; "I feel like the collegiality makes this structure [of my vision] possible, more effective, than if I were doing this by myself. In fact, I don't think I could do this by myself." Kelly also explained that such collegiality would enable her to put the time and thought into the sort of classroom she wants to create; it would allow her to have a more flexible schedule, and would support her own professional development and reflection. She remarked,

> On a curricular level, the collegiality makes the education a lot richer. [It] makes, for instance, the flexible use of time possible, that [we] would need in order to give [us] the time to actually sit together and be working on these projects in groups; to set up small seminars where [we] talk about things or reflect about what just happened.

Teachers who shared Kelly's vision, she imagined, could reinforce the kind of approach Kelly takes in her classroom by offering similar approaches to teaching and learning in their own classrooms. Thus, the students would have a consistent experience

across classes. Without that consistency Kelly believes that her students would get mixed messages about learning:

> They [would] leave my class and go somewhere else, and I don't know where they go. I don't know if their next period is going to be with a teacher who believes only in lectures, or with a teacher who isn't emphasizing those skills.

In addition, Kelly added, such consistent approaches would enable students to sustain their independent learning because they would encounter it in all their classes, not simply hers. She feels that a shared, school-wide approach might thus be more likely to contribute to attitudes and approaches to lifelong learning. "[Otherwise] they may learn something [just] in my class. But I would like them to develop a life-long habit."

Finally, Kelly also imagines that her school would ideally be connected to the community in such a way that students' coursework could be based in part upon current problems or issues being addressed by that community. As she explained in her vision statement, "I...see much community involvement—projects that reach into the society they live in, as well as the active participation of community members in the classroom. Schools should act as conduits between society and students."

Distance

"Still very far away."

The first time I interviewed her in June, 1997, Kelly was teaching at Blackwell High School, a large public high school in California's Bay Area. For much of her professional life at Blackwell, Kelly had participated in the Academy program, a "school within a school" that emphasized the integration of subject matter and provided structures for teachers to form teams that planned and taught curriculum. Kelly explained that though she and her Blackwell High colleagues had accomplished some progress, her vision lay at a significant distance from her current practice. In particular, despite the fact that Kelly and her colleagues in the Academy program at Blackwell attempted to provide consistent messages about learning across all classes, the students still did not approach learning in the ways that they hoped they would. She worried, "we're still very far away, I think, from students really owning their education."

Kelly felt that students at Blackwell had a tendency to be invested in their education for extrinsic reasons such as obtaining good grades towards admittance into a prestigious, well-respected college, rather than for the joy or excitement in learning itself. She related one incident that occurred just before our initial interview that illustrated her students' focus on grades.

> In one of my classes the conversation towards the end, an issue opened up about whether you do things because you want to do them, or you do things because of grades. And the students, at one point some of these students who I think very much respect me as a teacher and we have a close rapport were very honest and said, "Let's just face it Ms. Yu, you care too much; we don't even care at all. We would rather just have you tell us what to do because we need the 'A's' to get into college."

Kelly added that though she and her colleagues had been "successful" in helping Blackwell students identify and explore topics of personal interest, she still found that her students emphasized their grades and not their development as learners;

> They'll still get their grades back, and it's like, 'Why did YOU give me an A?" As opposed to them turning it in and saying, "This is definitely a work in progress," or "This is a culminating work for me." They just don't have any sort of reflectiveness about that.

Kelly attributed some of the Academy students' attitudes to comparisons to Blackwell students in the traditional program. She noticed that the students in the Academy program tended to compare their program to that of students in the traditional program. And rather than understanding that they were learning powerful approaches to information, she felt the students were focusing upon the content knowledge that they were "missing."

> I think there's a lot of stress for students comparing themselves to the other students…in the traditional program. More often then not, they'll say, "We're behind," because we haven't covered something that somebody else [has], rather than seeing what they're learning as being advanced. For instance, we were covering basic trigonometry in November of this year in Geometry, whereas all Geometry students in the traditional [program] never get there until the end of the year. But that didn't register in my students' heads as "This is advanced." They

> just thought, "Why aren't we learning proofs? Why aren't we learning what the other kids are learning?"

In order to get closer to their vision, Kelly felt that she and her Blackwell colleagues needed to help the students rethink the purposes of school. She mused, "It's almost like reshaping what their perception of school is." Kelly observed that Blackwell's current structure was not yet consistent in the way it needed to be to support her vision. As she explained, referring to the way students compared their progress to their peers in the traditional program, "we still have to live under the traditional system, working in a traditional school. And that hinders us a lot."

Kelly also reflected that though her colleagues appeared to agree on a school vision, differences arose around the means of achieving the vision.

> [T]wo years ago, I remember having these staff meetings about our vision as a school. And it seemed like most people agreed to the same sort of tenets about structuring education for the students. But it seemed like we could never quite agree on how to get there.... [W]hen we begin proposing pathways of how to get there...there definitely is this tension about which pathway is the best to go, and that one pathway threatens another pathway. So that's...where we get stuck.

Kelly looked forward to her new school, Hilltop, where all teachers—and all students—shared the same focus and goals.

On the other hand, Kelly did sense that she was making gradual progress towards her vision. She commented, "It always feels like I've made a couple of steps." Kelly was quite conscious of this internal tendency to continually assess progress along the path towards her vision. She mused, "I think I tend to be the type of person who always looks at: 'How much more do we have to go?'" Kelly remarked that she feels confident at least that the "direction," the path towards the vision is the right one. "But especially at the end of the year when I look back at where they started from, I think, this is the right direction to go," Kelly comments.

Getting Closer

The following February when she had begun teaching at Hilltop, Kelly described anticipating that her vision was imminent. She and her Hilltop colleagues were actually going to attempt to implement her—and their—vision. To that end, Kelly and her

colleagues were developing a plan to support the development of independent thinking in students that involved focusing on different "levels" of thinking for students. They had identified what they called an "inquiry level," for younger students, in which students would learn how to approach problems, pose good questions and reflect on their work (essentially, learn meta-cognitive skills). Then they had identified a "self-initiating" level at which students would be able to identify areas of interest to them and pursue them somewhat independently:

> So one idea,...speaking in more concrete terms, is that we would have three levels. Something which we would call it like an "inquiry level" designed for students to, I mean we would still naturally be teaching content only the process....But in addition to that there would be a focus on acclimating the student to the school's sort of philosophies....So they would become more familiar with the habits of lifelong learning which are a series of questions and habits that we have identified as important for an independent critical thinker.

Kelly and her colleagues at Hilltop were beginning to make very concrete what Kelly had imagined in her vision.

The Role of Vision in Kelly's Life

Kelly noted that she uses her vision as a guide for practice constantly. She commented that it was always on her mind, "I think about it all the time." Her vision guided her curriculum design, for instance;

> ...when I really sit down and actively use my vision, is when we actually get together in our math-science planning team to plan out the unit. Because we always start with: "What do we want our students to get...Where do we want our students to be at the end of the unit?" And we often start out with: "How did we do on the last unit? Where are they? And what can we carry from that last unit; what can we do a little bit differently?" Those are probably the times I think the most about it.

Kelly also described using her vision to help her evaluate future plans, to make sure that she is indeed heeding her vision. She observed,

> ...It forces me to always check back, so that when I'm planning a unit, there's always a tendency to either fall back on something you're most comfortable with—maybe a lesson you taught before, that worked well last year. And so you [often] just want to do it again, because it was fun that year...So the vision helps remind me, "Wait, you're doing this for THIS group of students; what do you want them to actually get out of this lesson? Yes, it might have worked well, but what did they actually get out of it?"

In addition, Kelly uses her vision as a means of reflection, of assessing and evaluating past practice. Kelly described an experience at Blackwell that illustrated the way in which vision helped her and her colleagues reflect upon their practice and assess their work. She and her colleagues had been working hard to develop an integrated math and science curriculum that focused upon learning concepts in a framework of critical thinking. However, during a period when the students were about to take a statewide mathematics exam, she and her colleagues started "getting panicked" that the students were not learning enough content and they temporarily discarded their approach, focusing instead upon "exposure" to the material and upon memorizing formulas. The students took the exam and Kelly and her colleagues discovered that they hadn't recalled any information or perhaps even understood the material that they had memorized. Kelly recalled, "Afterwards we had to sit down and really backtrack almost and remind ourselves, 'Wait, this is our vision. Why is it that the kids didn't own this? Why...wasn't it meaningful to them?'" She concluded, "So the vision is kind of like—it's just a reference—it's always a reference point to where you are." The clarity of Kelly's focus, upon independent thinking, contributes to the strong role it plays in her life, such a significant role that she described it as the "context" in which she worked. Because she is quite clear and articulate about what she envisions, Kelly can summon her vision at will in order to assess whether or not her current practice is meeting her vision.

In addition, Kelly's perception that she was making steps towards her vision bolsters her motivation. Kelly observed that a sense of movement towards her vision actually sustained her commitment to teaching; "In some ways, I've been living with compromises, but the thought of me progressing towards that vision is what's kept me in [teaching]."

Indeed, for Kelly at Blackwell, it was particularly important that she considered her vision as a destination. She conceptualized vision as something towards which one

advanced, made steps, and enjoyed progress. What seemed to be a "scaled" vision enabled her to bolster her commitment to teaching, and allowed vision to continue to play a central role in her life as a measure and a guide. In addition, the clarity and range of Kelly's vision—her clear focus upon independent thinkers, and upon a context of institutional support and collegial networks—may have helped her to identify an institution in which she could get closer to her vision, perhaps even to meet it. As Kelly exclaimed once she arrived at Hilltop, "I'm in the right place. I'm in the right school for this" (follow-up, line 156-157). Kelly's ability to identify supportive institutions may have provided her with the resilience of recognizing as well as making progress towards her vision.

Yet even though Kelly is now in a school that supports and reflects her vision, Kelly is still concerned, even fearful. While Kelly is extremely happy about her new school, she has entered a very new state context. The state of Massachusetts, where Hilltop is, has recently initiated a new set of standardized tests, tests that may have an enormous impact on the future of her teaching, her students' success, and her school. This weighs heavily on Kelly. Thus, while Kelly locates her anxiety in her own responsibility, her own understanding of her role, she also explains that at times her fears evolve into questioning whether the vision she and her colleagues have developed is ultimately one that will benefit the students. She poses a string of concerns,

> It's more…[like] will I be able to carry out my role? And what's going to happen? Is this good? Is this in the end good for the students? Or are we going to take them on this trip … where we don't know where it's going to end? (follow-up, lines 258-261)

Kelly then pauses, saying, "You know what it is? …I was giving you a lot of metaphors the last time. And … this is very geeky, but in 'Star Trek' there's this concept of the wormhole, right?" (follow-up, lines 264-266) She explains,

> You jump in one end and you end up on the other side of the universe, right? There was this one episode one time that showed a wormhole where one end point was stable but the other end point wasn't. And so they couldn't sell the rights to go travel this wormhole because you wouldn't know where you would end up. And that's what I feel like. It's like we have just identified the wormhole…and

> we're about to jump into it and I have no idea. I hope that the end point is where the vision is going to be. I'm scared that we're going to take our students on this trip and we may end up in some place completely different (follow-up, lines 266-271).

So even as Kelly expresses hope, she does not offer metaphors of nirvana, Eden, or heaven. Rather, she is talking about wormholes. Indeed, it seems that the conditions are so right for meeting her vision that a very real, but particularly unsettling possibility has emerged. What if Kelly and her colleagues teach in a way that is consistent with the vision, but the students do not achieve in a way that Kelly envisions, or worse, in a way that they need in order to be successful in life?

While Kelly has moved to a school context that is quite supportive of her vision, the wider context has suddenly become more prominent. If her students fail to achieve at the level Kelly believes is possible, it may have enormous consequences for the lives of these students. Indeed, when I interviewed her before my classroom visits in May, Kelly's concern about subject matter knowledge had mounted. The Hilltop students were in the midst of taking the new Massachusetts standardized science tests that were being piloted in her district along with some others in the city. Though she identified many "flaws" in the tests, Kelly appreciated that a poor performance could have a dramatic impact on her students' futures. She explained that such tests were forcing her to re-think the means to her vision,

> In terms of my concerns, I've been actually very concerned about substance. And it's leading me to sort of rethink a little bit…Not so much that I question the sort of relevance and perspective and even thematic units, but I sense even more so I guess the urgency that…in order for these students to go on to college and compete on an equal playing ground as can possibly be, we have to…look at content at lot more closely than I ever have before (pre-observation, lines 143-152).

Kelly worried that recent critiques of reforming schools might apply to her own students; "Much of the criticism I've heard of reform[ing] schools like this is that when they get to college these students are very good in thinking, they're very good in group work, but they are missing the content and so that handicaps them."

Kelly's fears and doubts may foreshadow what could happen if she discovers her vision is not successful, and her students do not seem to learn better; understand concepts more deeply, or become independent thinkers. This situation prefigures a potential outcome of Kelly's "wormhole." As the metaphor implies, the journey to the vision may culminate at a place where they don't want to be. This wouldn't matter, if there were such high stakes were not attached to coming out at a particular place. Thus, while Kelly and her colleagues pursue their vision, they do so in constant awareness of the statewide context, the requirements of which are very likely contradictory to the kinds of efforts they are making in their school but which at the same time have very real consequences for her students. In turn, Kelly struggles with fears and doubts. What if her students seem unable to meet the expectations of the vision? Indeed, while the stakes for Kelly are high, with the potential for failure as a teacher, she recognizes—and fears—that the stakes for her students are even higher. While failure for her would be depressing and dispiriting, for her students it could alter or even suppress opportunities for lifetime success. Perhaps the journey will conclude in a location that constrains her students from making additional, exciting forays to higher education or other arenas for learning and growth.

Such concerns lead Kelly to question her vision at times. Kelly said that occasionally she worries that she is projecting her own wishes and desires upon her students. She wonders whether her vision reflects the educational experiences she herself would have loved to experience. She remarked, "This is the kind of classroom I would enjoy right now…[But] is that vision the kind of classroom they see themselves [as] being the best bet?" She added,

> Maybe my manifestation is different than what these students…maybe it's too limiting for these students. Maybe I should be thinking of more things, more ways that they would—or I should say different scenarios in which they would become actualized learners.

Again, this portrait provides an intriguing contrast to the portrait of Andrea. When faced with doubts and concerns about her vision, Andrea responds by wondering if it is too challenging for her students. Kelly's response, on the other hand, is to question whether her vision is too limiting.

In the face of this pressure-cooker of personal, collegial, school, state and even nationwide stakes, Kelly and her colleagues display remarkable courage and faith. They pursue their vision, hopeful that they are doing the right thing. They try to adjust their efforts to account for their concerns. Kelly, for instance, searches for an appropriate balance between content and process in her curriculum that will still allow her to remain faithful to her vision;

> My vision is not altered…I don't think I'm going to spend more time lecturing and memorizing and giving tests or anything like that. I don't envision it like that. I still envision … finding ways to do labs, to do projects to help build that into their understanding. So I think my vision is…not altered, it's just perhaps I need to be more precise in structuring my class.

In sum, the clear and broad focus of Kelly's vision supports her commitment and motivation in teaching. The considerable detail of her focus and the well-articulated steps towards her vision enable her vision to function effectively both as a guide for her practice and a means of reflecting upon it. It even helped her to select a school that would be particularly supportive of her vision, even nurturing her vision towards greater elaboration and enactment. However, to some extent, as Kelly and her colleagues approach their vision, the clarity of the focus and the deep articulation of the vision together with the decreasing distance, becomes something of a double-edged sword. While clarity is a boon for planning and reflection, when distance decreases, one must fully commit to a particular path. In a sense, Kelly and her colleagues may feel required to "buy the rights" to the wormhole to which she referred in the opening vignette. Hence, along with hope and anticipation come the challenges of questions, doubts and fears about the vision, themselves, and their students. Yet Kelly and her colleagues remain faithfully committed to charting new territory, hopeful that they are doing the right thing, but ever unsure.

The Role of Teachers' Vision in the Support of New Teachers

How can understanding teachers' vision help support and sustain teachers like Andrea and Kelly? One of the most powerful predictors of teachers' commitment to

teaching is a "sense of efficacy—the teachers' sense that he or she is making a positive difference in the lives of students" (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p.9). There are three key ways that vision may help support such a sense of efficacy. First, vision may provide a means for *surfacing and examining teachers' beliefs*, for providing a way to validate and take into account teachers' hopes and dreams. Making vision explicit may also help provide a foundation for new teachers' developing theories. Second, vision may provide a means for *helping new teachers "plumb the depths"* of their beliefs and goals—examining, challenging, and further articulating their beliefs and assumptions. Finally, examining vision may provide a means for *new teachers to understand and deal with the gap* between their hopes and their practice. The extent to which people like Andrea and Kelly feel successful and efficacious may have a lot to do with the way they perceive—and navigate—the gap between their vision and their practice. This work suggests that learning to navigate the gap between vision and practice may be especially helpful in enabling teachers like Kelly to develop that sense of efficacy to which Darling-Hammond refers. Indeed, a number of the teachers (Kelly included) in this research used their visions to select contexts in which they could sustain such feelings of agency.

Surfacing Visions

Surfacing teachers' visions may enable teacher educators to design their curriculum to begin with their students' current understandings—in other words, to start where teachers are. A number of teacher educators and scholars have pointed out that uncovering teachers' lay knowledge and beliefs can have a profound impact upon how and what teachers learn (as well as unlearn) in their professional development programs (Holt-Reynolds, 1999; Lester & Onore, 1990). Building upon research on the relationship between teachers' beliefs about teaching and their professional practice, these scholars argue that teacher development programs must elicit teachers' lay knowledge in order to confront contradictions, challenge assumptions, and deepen knowledge in turn laying the ground for more complex personal and theory-based professional knowledge (Lortie, 1975; Clandinin, 1986; Grossman, 1990; Britzman, 1991). Lester and Onore (1990) use the visual metaphor of photographic exposure to describe this process:

> It is clear from all we know about how the human mind works...that the only way to learn something is to make connections to what we already know, even if what we know seems to contradict the new information. We think this is the key to unlearning, too. No amount of brainwashing, or conversion in the religious sense, or, even, new methods and materials will do the job, because all these ways deny or devalue the power of prior experience and the existence of an already formed and formidable mental picture of how the world does and should operate. Getting at that picture, exposing it to a different light, sets the process of unlearning in motion (p.41).

By asking teachers to describe their visions, teacher educators could develop a powerful new means to surface the insights and foresights that drive teachers' work. Indeed, Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, and Kron (1998) suggest that visual images of teachers and teaching can be a particularly useful means of prompting the articulation and discussion of assumptions and beliefs about teaching and learning. Similarly, in this study, teachers had little trouble writing about their visions, in response to the questions about their ideal classroom. Yet a number of teachers commented to me afterwards that they had never been asked to articulate their visions in this way, some adding that they had never really talked about or shared their visions in their teacher education program. In fact, Andrea commented that

> ..in my program, that word had never been used, never introduced and never ever discussed...there were always goals and expectations but not the idea of vision. Yet...I've seen in my head what I imagine the class would be for so long. And I always knew it was there, but I never labeled it 'vision', or defined what vision is.

For teachers like Andrea, building upon what is already "there" may provide a means for better understanding what new teachers envision, imagine and what they already know about teaching and learning as they enter a teacher education program. Vision may then provide teacher educators with a foundation for helping new teachers develop their professional theories, as a way to "bring it all together" in a way that links theory and practice.

Plumbing the Depths

A number of scholars have suggested that it is possible to adopt the jargon of reform without translating those ideas into practice (Cohen, 1990; Cuban, 1984). Similarly, some teachers' initial visions may well be vague and shallow, containing blurry images or superficial ideas that have not yet been examined carefully or fully elaborated. Once such visions are uncovered, teacher educators might begin to help new teachers to elaborate and interrogate their visions. For example, if a teacher has a nascent vision of a student-centered classroom, she could be assisted to think more deeply about what might that look like in detail. What role(s) does it suggest for herself as a teacher? What role(s) would it lead to for her students? What kind of work and activities would be happening in the classroom? In addition, teacher educators could assist student-teachers to spell out the means to approach their visions, in identifying realistic and reasonable steps that will help them advance towards their visions. Such experiences might have been particularly helpful for teachers like Andrea, who envisioned a student-centered English classroom in which her students would be investigating and discussing sophisticated literary texts, yet observed that she had few supports in figuring out how to develop such a curriculum. Andrea thus found herself confined to teaching her students in a more "traditional" manner, with students in rows rather than in groups, moving through the text laboriously, passage by passage, rarely engaging in the kind of analytic, deeply thoughtful discussions of literature she imagined. Teacher educators might thus avoid stranding new teachers at sea, able only to glimpse from afar the exciting islands described in their teacher education classes, but having no idea how to embark upon the journey. As Andrea reflected,

> I keep thinking about how this…would have been so helpful in my program. Just constantly thinking about this idea of vision…something to start from. [J]ust imagining where you want to be, but also thinking about where you actually are. And how to look at that discrepancy and see, well how far to you have to get from one to the other? What can you do? What's the process in order to achieve your vision?

Such a process of careful examination and assisted articulation may be particularly important in enabling teachers to move beyond superficial images to a more

complex picture of the craft and to rich images of practice that represent possible goals and dreams.

Examining visions could also lead teachers to identify conflicts and contradictions, vaguenesses, and even blindspots in their visions. Britzman (1991) has shown that the persistence of stereotypical images and cultural "myths" surrounding teaching can suppress dialogue about learning to teach, in turn stifling and perhaps even contradicting teachers' images of the possible. As Lester and Onore (1990) have suggested, "Teacher educators have a responsibility to uncover, to confront, and to excise those myths that stymie change" (p.208). Providing forums for new teachers to share and examine their visions may provide a means of confronting the relationship between conflicting images and ideals—perhaps between societal (or local) idealized images of teachers and teaching, and their own personal ideal images of teachers and teaching. Prospective teachers may also benefit from examining the assumptions implicit in their own visions, perhaps questioning whether any of their own images may be reflective of stereotypes or cultural cliches themselves (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). They might look for instance, at the images they use to describe themselves and their students. What inchoate ideas sit beneath the surface of their visions? For example, why does Andrea feel that the vision she had for private school students like herself is inappropriate for diverse public school students? Perhaps examining her vision more closely might help Andrea confront and even challenge her concerns and ideas about what is possible in a public school with minority students. Uncovering such tacit intimations can be very important for teachers to confront, and may provide yet another means of opening up the discourse that Britzman suggests is missing in teacher education.

Dealing with the Gap

The well-documented prospective teachers' experience of "reality shock" or, the disillusionment experienced upon entering the teaching profession that is often accompanied by an apparent shift from "progressive" to "conservative" perspectives, attitudes and teaching practices could be the result not only of learning about the bureaucratic nature of schools, the isolation of the profession, and the ambiguous nature

of teaching that many have documented (Veenman, 1984), but from the gap between their own vision and their current reality. This study of vision reveals that disillusionment may result in far more than deflated emotions and the disturbing attitude shift from progressive to conservative documented by researchers. The gap between vision and reality in fact lead some of these teachers to learn that their visions are impossible and that they and their students are incapable of attaining them. For instance, for a teacher like Andrea, we saw how a clear, distant vision in an unsupportive context had drastic consequences not only for her emotional lives but also for what she learned. Other teachers in this study in with similar dimensions to their visions as Andrea—expecially those poised at the very beginning of their careers—had learned to lower their expectations, to doubt their own capacities, and those of their students and, as one teacher put it, that their visions were "uneducated ideals." In fact, another new teacher in this study suggested that she felt that she could learn nothing in her teacher education program that would address her current circumstances;

> When I think of possibilities, it's when I go to Mayfield State [her teacher education program]. I hate it, sometimes. I go to this Wednesday methods class. [People say things like,] "This is a good poetry technique," "We do this," or, 'In my class I did a whole unit on poetry, combined with...." I would get out of there and I would feel so depressed. I would feel a combination of envy and such disappointment...in myself. It's very hard to figure out what's you and what's your environment.

In addition to elaborating and challenging prospective teachers' visions in these ways, teacher educators may also help new teachers to develop visions with an episodic character—hence, appreciating that they are not going to be able to achieve ideal practice every single day. In so doing, teacher educators may be able to help new teachers prepare themselves to address the balance of ideal practice and ordinary work and in turn, they may be able to help new teachers recognize and celebrate the achievements that they do make.

Finally, teacher educators may also be particularly helpful in assisting student-teachers to consider what one teacher called "the bigger picture"—the contextual supports of their vision. Given a more robust understanding of the relationship between

vision and context, teacher educators may be able to help student-teachers identify field placements that may provide an appropriate "reach" for their visions. Such an understanding might also allow more student-teachers to be able to navigate the professional work field and find schools that matched their visions in the ways that Kelly did. Or, teacher educators may at least be able to help teachers avoid the potentially debilitating mismatches that led teachers like Andrea to consider leaving the profession. This is not to suggest that it is not appropriate or healthy to teach in contexts that prompt interrogations of visions and even challenge them. Such experiences may be particularly powerful for student-teachers, given that they are provided ample opportunity for reflection and thoughtfully supported in their efforts and inquiries. Nonetheless, it is also clear that substantial conflicts can result in drastic consequences not only for a teacher's dreams and for her career as a teacher, but also for her learning and that of her students.

A final note about teacher education: a balance must be achieved between attention to the visions of both individuals and institutions. In order to carry out these efforts of supporting, challenging, nurturing and extending teachers' visions, teacher education programs need to be clear about the kinds of visions they themselves want to promote (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Such articulation of purpose can enable teacher education programs to select the kinds of students they may want to join their program, and to choose the right school partners to help their student-teachers develop their visions. Goodlad (1994) suggests that such vision is central to the development of a powerful teacher education program, quoting a colleague who has observed, "Where the vision is clear (and widely shared) and the will is strong, the people will surely prosper" (p.277).

Focusing upon teachers' vision may help us better understand why committed, thoughtful teachers like Andrea leave the profession, as well as why equally committed and thoughtful teachers like Kelly remain inspired in their work. But perhaps even more important, teachers' vision may also provide us with a particularly powerful means of focusing upon the support and sustenance of new teachers, by enabling us to validate their commitments, challenge and deepen their beliefs about teaching and learning, and even help them develop clear and attainable steps that assist them in moving closer to their ideals. Indeed, understanding and addressing issues of teachers' vision could play a

central role in assuring that more and more new teachers learn to hope, rather than only hope to learn.

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[1] The largest number of students at Andrea's school were African-American (30%), followed by 27% White, 26% Hispanic, 7% Asian and 1% "Other."

[2] As some have pointed out, schools may be better characterized as a set of subcultures or a group of sub-contexts (McLaughlin, et al, 1993). However, for purposes of this study, I have found it useful to characterize the teachers' contexts in order to help me make some distinctions between different contexts and experiences of teachers.

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